March 23, 2022

Dear Members of the Colchester Board of Education,

This letter is in regards to the “Parent Focus Group” and other concerns related to the special education services in Colchester. I will also attach in detail, my correspondence regarding this occurrence so that you understand the magnitude of importance that special education for students with disabilities is to me on both a personal and professional level and provide you with some insight on how this process was handled.

Today I am writing to the Board of Education in hopes of obtaining accurate information for myself and the other parents in regard to the special education review aka “Parent Focus Group”.

-Has the Board of Education initiated this consultation team to conduct a review? If not, who is this team reporting to?
-Why have I and other parents been excluded from this process?
-How long has this review process been occurring? I received an email that this is standard practice in Colchester, to review services periodically, when I Inquired about this focus group.
-What is the current status of the Special Education Director? We have received automated emails that she is on an “extended leave”.
-Have the multiple complaints regarding her conduct been investigated?
- Will those findings be disclosed to the parents who have bravely come forward regarding their experiences?

In regards, to the notice of the focus group: Receiving emails from unknown senders/unfamiliar departments in the District, having received none at all, or being excluded after expressing interest does not create a transparent, comfortable space for parents. Parents should feel comfortable and free to advocate and be a voice for their children rather than silenced .

The parent group has faith that the current Board of Education has the best interests of the students of Colchester . Further concerns are that there is activity occurring within the administration with very little transparency and a selective process which could indicate bias by excluding some families from participation for an area of great concern to the Special Education families in Colchester and perhaps the community. In addition, there seems to be an overuse of legal power by the Administration in Colchester where the Director is utilizing legal representation against unrepresented families creating an environment where parents are feeling bullied, intimidated, retaliated against in advocating for the educational needs of their

children and overpowered. This creates an adversarial environment which interferes with the students education and best interests of the students.

The parents of special educations students in Colchester are only looking out for the best interests of their children. They are fatigued, disheartened, and disappointed that they are once again only advocating for appropriate services and programs for their children and are being met with negativity, hostility, and legal force. We are doing our best for our children and only seek to be heard and be viewed as respected team members in making educational decisions for our children which will affect their entire future.

Respectfully,

Tina Pappalardo on behalf of the Parent Group
Advocate

Below is a timeline of the correspondence regarding the “Parent Focus Group” I personally experienced.

*On February 23 3:30 pm I received an email from the PPS Department “donotreply@colchester.org. This is my first correspondence from this email address or hearing of this department. The email stated:
“Our district special education consultants would like to meet with parents/guardians of special education students who are willing to share their impressions about their experience with special education in Colchester. The group will meet virtually one evening next week. Please email efabiszak@colchesterct.org by Friday 2/25/22 if you are interested in participating.”
It did not include a signature

*February 23 at 4:33 pm I responded with an email of interest and also to obtain more information regarding this “group”. It read as follows :
Hello Elisa,
I am interested in participating in the meeting with the district special education consultants. Please include me in the invite.
May I inquire on what the "Parent Focus Group" is. I don't believe I've heard of it before. Also, who are the District special education consultants?
Thank you.
Best,
Tina Pappalardo

*On February 24, at 11:39 am I received an email response:
Dear Ms. Pappalardo,
Our district conducts periodic program reviews of every department and the consultants are supporting the special education department program review. The parent focus group is a one time meeting focused on parent impressions and experiences with special education. I will share your email address with them as they are coordinating the meeting.
Take Care,
Elisa

At this point I had received no further information nor attendance instructions to any meeting. While I was in the midst of my own personal issues, dead- end meetings and correspondence with the district, it dawned on me that I had never heard back regarding this meeting so I once again emailed:

*On March 10 12:45 pm
“Hi Elisa,
What happened to the parent focus group meeting?
Thanks
Tina
Tina Pappalardo
Mother/Autism Advocate/Consultant”
*On March 11 I received the following response:
“Hi Ms. Pappalardo,
I forwarded the names of all parents who expressed interest and their email addresses to the consultants. I included your name and email address in the list I shared. I do not have any involvement with the parent focus group, other than gathering names and then forwarding them to the consultants. I am sharing their email address below so you can direct any questions you may have about the parent focus group to them.
incompliance21@gmail.com
Thank you,
Elisa”

*On March 12 at 8:36 am I sent the following email to Incompliance21@gmail.com
Hello,
I was invited to the Parent Focus Group Meeting that was to take place last week. I responded that this was of great interest to Me and that I would like to attend. I had not received any further info. Did that meeting already take place?
Please provide any information regarding this meeting.
Thank you

Tina Pappalardo

*On March 14 I was sent the following response:
Hi Tina,
Although the focus group meeting has passed, Dr. Colón and I are interested in speaking with you. What is your availability this week?
Dr. Regan

I began to reach out to others regarding this meeting and learned very few had information in regards to this "focus group"

8On March 22

I received the following email "
Good morning,
My name is Dr. Michael Regan, lead consultant from InCompliance LLC. As you may know, my colleague, Dr. Eric Colón, and I are in the process of completing a special education program review for the district. We received your names and email addresses from Colchester BOE regarding your interest in speaking with us about your experiences with special education in the district. Please let us know if you are able to attend a virtual meeting this Thursday at 7:00 pm.
Dr. Michael Regan
Lead Consultant, InCompliance LLC

*On March 22 11:17 I responded to the email:
Good morning,
Thank you for contacting me. Yes, I think it is imperative that I share our experiences. I am available on Thursday and look forward to speaking with you. There is another family that is interested in this process as well.
I will share your email address with them and hope you can accommodate scheduling. I'm uncertain how you are conducting your interviews but if it is more convenient and they are available , I'm happy to share my time with them.
I am one of the leaders of the Colchester Spec Ed Community Parent Group. When I received notice of this process, I learned that not everyone had received notice.
Thank you !
Best,
Tina Pappalardo
Mother/ Advocate/ Consultant
President -Save the Kid Fund Inc.
Notary

On the evening of March 22 I spoke with three other parents who had not received notice in regards to this meeting and my concern grew for transparency of this meeting and the exclusion of certain parents:

On March 23 at 6:11 am I wrote to the "consultation team"
Good morning,
May I ask if you might know why I would not have been included?
I'm disappointed to see that this meeting passed after I have inquired about it several times via the district.
I do appreciate you making time to meet with me. I'm just curious and concerned about how this bypassed me as well as other parents.
When did you first receive notice of my interest?
Thank you
Tina